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Velasquez. By Albert Kinross

FOR a complete and proper understanding of the labors of a great creative genius it is necessary to study and ponder over the conditions under which that genius was evolved, the surroundings and circumstances from which it drew sustenance and continuity. Therefore, previous to penning that part of my paper which shall deal exclusively with the work of the artist Velasquez, I shall endeavor to briefly outline the career, the mental activity, that led from the simple realism of "El Aguador de Sevilla" to the complete and splendid impressionism of the "Moenippus," of the "Maids of Honor" (Las Meninas).

VELASQUEZ was born in the year 1599, of well-to-do parents, in Spain, a country of no great artistic traditions; a fortunate circumstance this last, as it enabled him to embark on his life-work with no deadweight of time-honored and oppressive convention to contend against; and thus, from the first, he was permitted to see with his own eyes, to follow his own choice of subject, to select his own method of treatment. This independent attitude was rendered finally secure when Philip IV appointed him painter to the Royal Court, which appointment, though narrowing his range of subject, involved no sacrifice either of conviction, method, or frank delineation. The inevitable result of such beginnings, combined with a temperament, positive, sane, keenly alive to character and the subtle beauties of the apparently commonplace, was realism. King and peasant

alike were painted with the same unswerving fidelity to the model. The greater portion of his life was spent in the studio that Philip IV had fitted up for him in the Royal Palace, and, in this solitude, this aloofness from the jarrings, claims and counterclaims of schools and art-patrons, the artist must have thought out and meditated over ways and means for the most perfect expression of impulse and feeling. No wonder then that, in the course of years, he developed a technique that was in itself an inspiration.

THUS, ideally situated as he was, he outgrew the rigid realism of his earlier endeavors, and, after a year and a half spent in Italy, he enters upon the second period of his career. During his travels he had become acquainted with great masters, notably the Venetians, Titian and Tintoretto; and, on his return to Madrid, he was commissioned to superintend the decoration of the Royal Palace of Buen Retiro. Thus began the second period, and in the twenty years that elapse before his next visit to Italy, we find him at work in a gentler, a more poetic mood. He has begun to realize in actual paint the subtleties that brain and eye had awakened to during the first thirty years of his life. From piecemeal realism he has found the way to impressionistic unity, to proportion, values and tone. A flavor of Venice pervades his subject-pictures, a decorative tendency softens the harsher methods of his novitiate.

HIS third and greatest period dates from 1649, the year of his second visit to Rome. From then onward, to his death in 1660, were painted the supremest manifestations of his transcendent genius. He has developed the unequaled sensibility of his eyesight to its fullest power, his brain is no whit less intelli-

gent than his vision, he knows that realism is but an accurate rendering of the obvious, but a stepping-stone to the essence of things. And this essence of things he has made the goal of his latest endeavors. Such work as this should be felt, not written about. It does not dazzle, it pervades; all that is strong and calm and fearless within us responds to this appeal. Velasquez has ignored the barbarian in human nature, he does not play on our superstition, our awe, fear and wonder. His final call is on our honesty, our truthfulness, our manhood. The unconscious message of his life's work was that of Goethe, that of Carlyle, "Im Ganzen, Guten, Wahren, resolut zu leben!"

LET us now turn for awhile to the paintings that have evoked this inadequate tribute. I pass rapidly over the *bodegones*, the still life and humble folk whose reproduction he at first essayed. You will find relentless realism, a treatment that has let nothing escape, in these works; the flesh-painting is hard, the modeling iron; and yet, at the age of twenty-five, Velasquez has painted his "Topers," a group that would alone have given splendid reputation to any artist of any period. He has mastered the mechanism of the human countenance: expression, bucolic delight for the most part, is here, and to spare. We smile back at the frank, animal joy of the unshaven boor in the center. The flesh, modeled in high relief, is an end, not a means; as in the later Velasquez, the group hangs loosely together, there is something of the photographer in the composition. I am speaking of a modern of the moderns, I would have you remember.

VELASQUEZ has now mastered matter as matter. It is no longer all-important, it has its place, its proportion in the general unity of things. It need not, indeed it shall not have his sole consideration. To achieve this result he discards his earlier and more arbitrary methods, discovers values, tonality. His portraits become the center of a scheme; costume and flesh are painted with due regard to accessories and surroundings. Character and expression are no longer forced upon your notice, but are inevitabilities. Should you desire to study them, they are there; should you, however, prefer to dwell on the total effect, which includes these two commodities, Velasquez will be more impressed with your intelligence. To this second period belong the equestrian portraits of Philip and Olivarez, also the "Spanish Admiral," in the National Gallery. "The Surrender of Breda" is also of this epoch. Contrast its design, its pattern, its unity, its superb combination of strength and beauty with the early "Topers." When you survey these later paintings, recollect well that the picture has not been executed to fit the canvas, as is the case with the Italian masters, but that the size of the canvas had depended entirely on its purpose. You will find that Velasquez frequently sewed additional pieces of canvas on to the original sheet. Thus only could he secure the absolute symmetry, the perfect proportions, that relativeness that makes each one of these later works a living organism, a thing from which nothing can be taken away, to which nothing can be added, without destroying the completed unity of the whole.

NOTABLE, too, are his landscapes of this date. There is something of Constable, more of Corot, in his treatment of foliage, in its directness, the effect of mass rather than of single leaves. The figures are set well into the picture, they have grown with it, everywhere is space, atmosphere, and true perspective, the last not merely a shrinking, a decrease in size, but mutability of outline, loss of prominence, a vaguer impression. Always by eye, and by eye only, does he draw, does he record, the same method, whether he is at work on a portrait of his royal patron or an "Avenue," a "Fountain of the Tritons." The same method, but an eyesight trained to see as no other human eye has seen before or since.

AND yet to a higher pitch of perfection than that attained in any of the canvases I have mentioned does this man ascend. The decorative note becomes more restrained, a means, not an end. Velasquez' last works have the simplicity of absolute directness, we are at last in actual touch with the soul, the very essence of all that he dignifies with his brush. His restraint is the restraint of Nature, of Fate; there is no concession to any one human weakness, neither trick, sensation, nor artifice. He paints what he sees with the impassiveness of an Olympian god. And he sees everything. We revel in his eyesight. Space to us, at first a mere void, becomes palpable; we look at "The Maids of Honor," into the dimnesses of that room in the solemn old palace. There is a high ceiling, three walls and a window. In the empty space, between the heads of the figures and the ceiling, the light lives and palpitates; we follow its struggle with the shadow, eagerly, as though it were a live thing. And Velasquez

has made it live, as everything that his brush has transferred to canvas lives. We see the whole scene as he saw it, the sombre apartment, the group intruding on the painter at work. We are back in the old Spanish palace, the younger by two and a half centuries; our eyes are on the little princess—how beautiful her pale gold hair looks in this gloomy room, and her white frock! Our eyes are on her, yet we take in the other figures, not so completely as the princess perhaps, but we are aware of the artist at his easel, a grand fellow this, there are two dwarfs to our right and some grown-up people talking. Let us turn from the princess to these. We cannot—for that would necessitate a new picture.

SUCH is the Impressionism of Velasquez. He arrests a scene, he gives us one moment of his own life, that one moment is immortalized; to him it was one of thousands and tens of thousands, one that he has rescued and handed down to us, alive, vivid, complete. How many artists have done as much! There you have the aim, the end of this man's striving, the Ultima Thule of his art. You will see his "Spinners," his "Venus," the single figures, "Æsop," "Moenippus," and the rest, live with his last word. They are as absolute as created beings, all framed in the very space, the very air in which they have their being, of which they are part, as is this same space part of themselves.

THIS paper must necessarily partake more of the nature of a suggestion than of a statement. I believe, however, that most of you will gather from it that, some two and a half centuries ago, was accomplished by a single man, with little other stimulus than faith, all and more than the most progressive artist of to-day has achieved. In France a



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Carolus-Duran looks up to Velasquez as his one human teacher; among English-speaking peoples, a Whistler, a Sargent, and the most gifted of the Glasgow portraitists are eagerly following in his line of thought.

As an instance of the close alliance between his work and that of all those who are to-day striving after a simpler, a more direct art, I may mention his "Adoration of the Shepherds," an early and no doubt unsatisfactory canvas; and yet herein Velasquez has accidentally accomplished all that Newlyn has tried to do of malice prepense.



VELASQUEZ, whose Infantas, clad in inæsthetic hoops, are, as works of Art, of the same quality as the Elgin marbles.**

From the sunny morning, when, with her glorious Greek relenting, she (Art) yielded up the secret of repeated line, as, with his hand in hers, together they marked in marble, the measured rhyme of lovely limb and draperies flowing in unison, to the day when she dipped the Spaniard's brush in light and air, and made his people live within their frames, and stand upon their legs, that all nobility and sweetness, and tenderness and magnificence should be theirs by right, ages had gone by, and few had been her choice.

Countless, indeed, the horde of pretenders! But she knew them not. A teeming, seething, busy mass, whose virtue was industry, and whose industry was vice.**

And again to the West, that her next lover may bring together the Gallery at Madrid, and show to the world how the Master towers above all; and in their intimacy they revel, he and she, in this knowledge; and he knows the happiness untasted by other mortals.

WHISTLER

Book Review: "A History of Modern Painting," by Richard Muther



MUTHER starts modern art at the end of the eighteenth century with Hogarth, Reynolds, and Gainsborough. After a résumé of the general principles and direction of the history up to that time he lays the heritage upon Hogarth, with also the responsibility of moral teaching, which in that age was part of the artist's business. Realism and portraiture was the attitude of art, which, passing from Hogarth to Reynolds and Gainsborough, became naturalism and portraiture of a more spiritual order. The early English school started originally because of the patriotic, local sense of the English people which expelled foreign influences, and it in time impressed itself upon the art of the continent according to that succession of influences which always allows precedence to the strongly original.

THROUGH the course of his history Muther traces an intimate relation between painting and the movements of literature, leaning the former on almost every whim of the latter. But he feels this beholdance to the prevalences of the time a movement that has vitally affected the progress of art, rather than a mere personal submission to the unfavorable retrogressive influence of

The History of Modern Painting. By Richard Muther, Professor of Art History at the University of Breslau. Late Keeper of Prints at the Munich Pinakothak. Three volumes. New York, Macmillan & Company. Price, bound in cloth, gilt top, Twenty Dollars.